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TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: MUGHRABI GATE RAMP PLAN PROGRESSING, BUT
EXCAVATIONS CAUSE WAQF CONCERN

REF: A. JERUSALEM 01570
[1](#)B. TEL AVIV 02326

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Jerusalem municipal official Irene Rubin told PolOff October 19 that the Regional Planning Committee approved blueprints for a new Mughrabi Gate ramp and there is now a period of public review during which interested parties can present objections to the plan. Jerusalem attorney Danny Seidemann told PolOff that Israeli law requires excavations await the final approval of the ramp plans and welcomed the transparency afforded by the public review. Head of the Waqf Azzam al-Khatib told PolOff that the GoI must coordinate with the Waqf and protect Muslim ruins. Advisor to Jerusalem's Mayor Mordechai Levy told PolOff that the Waqf does not have a voice on this issue. End Summary.

REGIONAL COUNCIL APPROVES DRAFT MUGHRABI
GATE RAMP, PREPARES FOR PUBLIC REVIEW

[1](#)2. (C) Director of the Division of City Planning at the Jerusalem Municipality Irene Rubin told PolOff October 19 that the Regional Planning Council on October 17 or 18 approved for public review the plans for a new ramp leading to the Mughrabi Gate (reftels). According to Rubin, once the plans are published, some time in the next two-eight weeks, interested parties will have a sixty day review period to present objections. After the review, the Planning Council will announce final plans for the new ramp. Construction will not begin until after the review, Rubin said, probably in January 2008 at the earliest.

EXCAVATIONS THREATEN TO DISRUPT
CALM AT THE MUGHRABI GATE

[1](#)3. (C) Jerusalem attorney Danny Seidemann told PolOff that Israeli law requires that the construction plan be approved before excavation of a construction site can commence. He added that renewed excavations at the Mughrabi Gate would be of questionable legality at this point. Seidemann welcomed the Regional Planning Committee's approval of the plans for public review, which he said will lead to a transparent process for determining the approved plan for the ramp.

[1](#)4. (C) Azzam al-Khatib, Head of the Waqf, told PolOff 23 October that there are currently no excavations at the Mughrabi Gate, but the Waqf opposes unilateral GoI actions on this issue. Excavations at the Mughrabi Gate, he said, threaten to destroy ruins dating from Muslim periods in order to uncover Jewish ruins, and the Waqf must participate in the decision-making process. (Note: PolOff confirmed during multiple October 14-23 visits that no digging is taking place

at the site. End note.)

¶5. (C) Mordechay Levy, advisor to Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski, told PolOff that neither the Municipality nor any other GoI body needs to coordinate with the Waqf on the Mughrabi Gate excavations and ramp. He agreed the decision-making process must be transparent, but said the decision belongs to the GoI. The Municipality is not concerned with the excavations, he said, only with the new ramp. He added that construction requirements must be balanced against the desire to preserve the historic layers of the city.

¶6. COMMENT: The upcoming public review of the plans will give concerned parties the opportunity to express their opinions about the new ramp. However, Jerusalem authorities indicate no intention to seek input from the Waqf, and the Waqf will not independently participate in the public review process. Unless the GoI takes concerted steps to assuage the concerns of the Waqf - either by explaining or revising the plans for the ramp - we expect the Waqf and Palestinian contacts to maintain their suspicion of and opposition to the plan. End Comment.

WALLES